

*THE THEOLOGY OF POLITICS :TOWARD A LATIN AMERICAN
ECCLESIOLOGY*

*I believe... in the Holy Spirit,
in the Holy Church.
Apostles' Creed*

In the previous chapters we gave an example of the possibility of discourse, a way of thinking. Using certain categories, we have restated the question of ethics, what I could have called moral theology but which, in reality, is simply a branch of the one theology in praxis.

In this chapter I would like to dwell on the following theme: a Latin American ecclesiology .Here I will deal with another article of the creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church"; this is how the most ancient of creeds states it (Denzinger, 1963; no. II). I intend to go into the theology of politics. The question we should ask ourselves is: What is the function of the church in world history? Or, more simply: What is the function of the church? You realize that we are in a crisis, a very difficult situation because some, seeing that the church is not responsive to certain demands, leave the church. Others, perhaps, demand of the church works and func-

tions that are not its task. For this reason, I believe that the church is in the center of all our discussions. On previous occasions I have pointed out that to deal with the history of the church is to deal with ecclesiology. I want to treat this theme in more depth.

PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

I believe that theological discourse should always begin with a theological anthropology, that is, with people, because God revealed himself to people. Even what we can say of God in himself is what has been revealed to us; it has been revealed to people as people are. This means that theology has to be anthropological. But this anthropology has distinct levels, and I would like now to take time to talk about these levels in order to have a better understanding of what is meant by the theology of politics, an ecclesiology.

We have seen that the fundamental categories we were using relate to the confrontation between what we called *totality-which* at base is always "my world," since it always begins with the self-and the otherness that is beyond the self. Moses is an example of the self to whom God spoke. Here we can use the very same categories. We always start with a world; but in Judeo-Christian thinking the world we start with is always secondary. The Other is always felt to be primary, as the origin. Here precisely is the difference between Greek and Hegelian (by that I mean modern European) thought and Judeo-Christian thought.

The Christian does not begin with the self but with the Other, whether it be the father, the mother, the homeland, or history, or, lastly, God the Creator. The whole idea of creation indicates precisely that before the self there is an Other. The confrontation that I spoke of is the

face-to-face stance. It is said of Moses that he was "face-to-face with God."

"Face-to-face" is the experience of someone before an Other recognized as someone. Let me give a simple example. You arrive at an institution and are met by a person who is nothing more than an employee to you. You do not recognize him as "someone" but as just an adjunct of the institution. But if this person suddenly turns out to be an old friend, you say, "Hi, John, how are you?" He ceases to be an employee and becomes someone that we are asking something of. You expect his answer to be informative; otherwise you would not have asked your question. Someone facing someone and putting a question to that person-this has to be an interpersonal experience.

For me to come face-to-face with someone-the Other-I have to see that person as free and not just a thing in my world that I could dominate. If I am a boss, I can dominate the worker. But if I see the worker as "someone," then he or she is much more than just a cog in the wheel; that worker becomes a mystery standing before me, as exteriority, as someone who is beyond the system I rule over. The system can be my home, my factory, my neighborhood-my world. We have already noted that the word "world" means "flesh." Christ uses the word to mean "totality ." The Other as free is always going to be beyond the world, my world, my totality. The experience of the face-to-face is proper to the Semite tradition (it is found in the Code of Hammurabi) but it is also part of the Hebrew tradition as expressed in the thinking of the prophets. Later on Christ will equate it to the kingdom of heaven.

The face-to-face is not to be confused with "vision." Vision always occurs within a world (I *see* things, I *know* them). But I do not see the Other as other; I love and

espect the Other as other and I ask who he or she is. The Other is beyond my vision, in the realm of justice and love. This experience of the face-to-face is proper to and basic to all Judeo-Christian thinking.

"Face" means countenance and countenance is the person. It is precisely here that the formulation of trinitarian dogma began. God reveals himself to humankind (who is also a countenance) in three ways: as the Father-Creator, as the Son- Word that is incarnated, or as Spirit. These three countenances or persons of God are what I would now like to talk about. But keep in mind that these three countenances belong to the Other, not to me, in the sense that, at heart, I will never see or experience *my* countenance.

THE EROTIC, PEDAGOGICAL, AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

This experience of face-to-face may seem abstract, but it is really concrete. Someone's countenance comes face-to-face with the countenance of a concrete other .

The first manner of self-revelation to others I will call the erotic. The Song of Songs comes to mind: "Kiss me with the kiss of your mouth." The book is about the relationship between a man and a woman. I call it erotic in the sense that the first face-to-face is that of a man with a woman. Of course, the Song of Songs is not only about a couple; it also sings of the unity of the church or of the world with God its Creator .

We are dealing here with a theological eroticism in which the face-to-face becomes mouth-to-mouth and, by a further extension of Hebrew thought, sexual intercourse. All other relationships, even the political, have their basis in this erotic relationship.

In the man-woman relationship there can be either respect for the Other or domination of the Other-the

sin of domination. This happens when the woman, who is the Other in the world of eroticism, is not respected as other but is used as a thing, a sex object, housewife, nursemaid to children, doer of multiple household tasks. Woman, nothing more than a thing, has been at the disposal of man for thousands of years; it just happens that Indo-European and Semite thought has always called God the Father.

In reality, as Paul Ricoeur has well noted, the title "Father" that we give to God is nothing more than a symbol, a symbol that designates him as the creative origin of all things. But because of male dominance, we stick with the word "father ." The male dominates our world even in the purest and most perfect symbolic language.

When the female ceases to be Other to the male, the totality is dominated by the male. This gives rise to the first sin: the subjugation of woman. How is the liberation of woman to be achieved ? We said that ethics studied the nature of liberation and it proved to be a matter of the "center" and of the "periphery." But this is political liberation on an international scale. Woman's liberation begins by being, first and foremost, erotic liberation, which entails the woman's moving from the status of alienation to being the Other to the male-a face-to-face relationship between two free people.

If we were to take a whole new look at this question, we would see that sin, subjugation, has made of *the home* (this is the world of the erotic) a totality where the woman is locked up in a kind of prison. The man goes freely out the door to work while the woman stays in seclusion. We have not yet got around to a theology of the married couple. We have taken a few steps in that direction but we are only just beginning. We need to scrap all our notions

about the erotic act and start over again if we are ever really going to bring about women's liberation.

The man-woman relationship will be normal and liberated only when one free person stands before the other who is also free. Only then will we see the fullness of *eros*. But what in fact happens? Even when two people who are free enter a marriage, both can end being totalized all over again and killing the Other. The *new* other that can be killed is a third party-the child. Its life can be snuffed out by abortion or it can be brought up along the same lines as the parents. I would call this the pedagogy of subjugation. The child will not become a fresh, new being but an echo of the parents. Basically they will teach it to be what they are. The child will not be a new, messianic, anointed chapter of history; in one sense it will be killed off.

The child then, growing up under the totalized couple, even in the best of care becomes once more the alienated one, dominated by the father and the mother. Given that the child is allowed to be born, it is subjected to educational dominance. We call this second phase of the parent-child, teacher-pupil relationship "pedagogy." Remember that Jesus was not called "father," nor "mother" either, naturally. He was called above all "teacher"-"rabbi." This means that Jesus established with his disciples (and the church in turn does the same with the world) a pedagogical relationship which in reality was prophetic. Thus we are no longer on the erotic level but have come to the pedagogical level.

If the child is brought up in the exact model of the parents, we are faced with a case of pedagogical subjugation. This is to a great extent the source of rebelliousness of the young; they become aware that they are expected to walk the same road as adults. The demand "to be like

people have always been" brings on a kind of alienation. Liberating the child is the same as pedagogical liberation. The relationship of parent-child or teacher-pupil must become a matter of respecting the child as Other and showing it the way in which it can arrive at being a free person in the presence of the free. In essence, this is the problem of pedagogical liberation.

Only when the child becomes a free being in the presence of CJ free being (the parent or the teacher) will the two become colleagues. When the teacher is able to hammer home to the pupil that he or she is equal to the teacher, they become colleagues. When the parent is able to lead the child gently toward adulthood, they become "brothers." And, precisely, the relationship between one brother and another is the third relationship that I call "political." It is a relationship of brothers as equals. It is perhaps on this level that the most frightening kind of alienation takes place repeatedly. When a brother does not respect another brother, he or she places the other one in subjugation-the domination of brother over brother or of master over slave. In humankind's history there have been many inequities and subjugations, including the latest of the center over the periphery -widespread political subjugations of brother over brother.

Even on this level of political subjugation-the last of the three-political liberation will happen and the subjugated brother will come to be equal to the free person and will live in justice. This political liberation is the third phase. The political subjugator conditions the erotic subjugator, and the latter the pedagogical, and the pedagogical the political, and vice versa, in such a way that it is impossible to determine which is metaphysically first. In the erotic relationship the woman learns, in her domestic upbringing, that she is to be the servant of the

male. From early childhood she is told that "girls play with dolls and boys learn to fight." Her education is directed toward being the servant, whereas he is trained to subjugate the world. This is also, and in the last analysis, a political question. She in turn trains her daughter to be the slave of her future husband and her son to be the lord and master that she never was. When we train the son to be subjugator, we are laying the groundwork for political behavior. But we could just as well begin our analysis with the political and it would be altogether proper to see the politico-economic as paramount and the other phases conditioned by it. At any rate, all these problems can be stated theologically because Christ is related to them all.

Our God reveals himself as Father and as Teacher, Son and Brother. All this has to do with Christian thinking. Besides being real, it is also theological, as we learn from the Old and New Testaments. They are categories that should stimulate our thinking.

To conclude, ecclesiology is the theology that deals with the political aspect of theology. We need to know how to explain the prophetic-pedagogical function of the church in the political history of the world.

ECCLESIOLOGY AS POLITICS AND PEDAGOGY

Our question was: What function does the church perform? What is the church for? The answer will come to us in part through theological reflection—the study of the relationship between brothers insofar as they are Christians. The relationship of one Christian with another within the ecclesial body is a matter of politics, because it is a relationship among the parts of a whole. But the church's role in the world is pedagogical. This is not the same thing as a political role, because the church

is not a state. The state takes care of the political side of things whereas the church, being a community of brothers (theological politics), fulfills a pedagogical, prophetic role. For this reason I repeat: Ecclesiology considers theological politics as a relationship of brothers within the ecclesial community, but with regard to *prophetic-pedagogical function* in world history.

So the question remains: What is the function of the church? Better still, what in fact has the church accomplished up till now in world history and, more concretely, in Latin America? We might answer, Nothing! If this would be our answer, we would be at a loss to know what is our function at the present moment.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, meaning "the assembly of those called together"; the Hebrew word is *kahal*, meaning "to summon the people," "those brought together for ." The question then arises: Brought together for *what*? This is the vital question. To put it another way: What role should the church play in the process of universal liberation, specifically in Latin America? The answer should make clear to what degree the church at times fails, sins, for not having taken the stand it should have in the process, maintaining an unshakable status quo or perhaps aligning itself on the side of sin. Before answering the question, we ought to take a clear look at other considerations.

ECCLESIAL PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY

To understand the church, we have to begin with its prehistory, the history of the non-Christian world-what we usually call the pagan world. In reality, though, the pre-Christian world was nothing more than the "flesh," the totality before the coming of the Word. The Hebrews went *into* Canaan, a pre-Israelite world. The Christians

went *into* the Roman empire, a pre-Christian world. Christians came to America and discovered there the Aztecs, the Tupi Guarani, the Caribs, the Incas-a pre-Christian world. Why is there always this kind of confrontation? Because it is of the nature of the church to insert itself. First there is a totality which does not yet have that which will come to it. This is the prehistory of salvation.

Afterward, there is a protohistory of the church. Israel-and we keep coming back to it-is its protohistory. Israel has a very interesting structure and I would like to talk about several aspects of it. First, there is the faith of Abraham. In Hebrews 11 we read: " Abraham believed." (There is a similarity here between the faith of Abraham and the openness of the Virgin Mary to the Spirit.) Abraham lived *in* the totality that was pre-Hebrew and even pre-revelation. He was just one more citizen in the third dynasty of Ur. He heard the Word and the Word offered a covenant to him. Think about it-in a pre-covenant world, someone speaks to him and he believes, he believes the Word of the Other and, accepting it to be true, he journeys forth on the strength of the word of the Other, with no guarantee other than that the Other had spoken to him. This is faith. There is a whole anthropological structure to faith: Abraham believed in someone, the Other; he took this word to be true; acceptance led to commitment because he left his homeland and journeyed through strange lands. This is precisely a process of liberation because he went from Ur of the Chaldees to the promised land, solely on the word of the Other and before the time of Moses.

This structure of Abraham's faith is at the heart of what will come later .

Abraham ratified the covenant, affirming his belief that God would look favorably on all who believed as he

did, those who would reject the totality and be capable of opening themselves to the Other, risking themselves for the Other. Concretely, the Other is always the poor, because they are beyond any possible system of exploitation. It was because of the covenant that a small tribe began its history of wandering as foreigners. Foreignness is a must for leaving totality behind and setting out for uncharted lands.

But the foreignness of the clan was transformed much later into a monarchy. With this transformation they were once more locked into totality. This is why Samuel, a prophet who leads a nomadic existence, wants to do away with every possible monarchic or political system. When the Israelites express a desire for a monarchy, Samuel asks them: Have you thought about how dangerous it is to have a king (1 Sam. 8-10)? Kings subjugate people. The prophet does not want to anoint a king because to anoint a king is to bring about totality. This will have a great deal of importance in later history. But they went ahead and anointed a king-Saul. From that moment there began the dialectic between the king and the prophet who spoke in the name of the Lord. The dialectic will continue for the duration of the monarchy. But what happens after this?

Upon the disappearance of the kingdom of Israel, the Israelites become foreigners, first in the Babylonian world, later in the Greek world and, finally, in the Roman world. It is the time of the diaspora. They cease being an ethnic and monarchic kingdom and become a *religious* community. It is worthy of note that the Jews can continue to be a religious community without any political backing.

This experience of the Hebrew world is transmitted to Christianity. The Jews discovered that any conceivable empire is not the kingdom of heaven, in a way that

enabled them to wait for the kingdom, the coming of the Messiah, without the backing of a formal government. This is the great experience of the diaspora as far as its proselytes were concerned. Remember that Paul would use the experience of the Jews in his preaching of the gospel of Jesus, starting in the synagogues. Without this first experience, the second would have been impossible. Therefore, the church will never be a political state like the monarchy of Israel. It learned from Israel's experience to be a diaspora or an eschatological religious community. At any rate the Jews had also an *institution* in the diaspora-the synagogue. The synagogue had a definite structure as an institution. But it was pedagogical and not political, because in the synagogue there was no assumption or exercise of power. Its function was to teach the Law. The pagan proselyte was educated in the Law. This means that the Jews saw a clear distinction between the political community of the monarchy and the religious community of the synagogue with its prophetic or eschatological sense. So it is very easy to demonstrate the importance of this process.

Properly speaking, the history of the church begins with the fact of Christ who is the culmination of the vocation of Israel's "remnant." Jesus will not start from scratch but will build on the experience of Israel. He will not structure a temporal kingdom and, therefore, when the Zealots want to consecrate him king, which is the same as trying to make him a political candidate, Jesus says No to this. But behind this No is his eschatological strategy and his historical tactic. We have to take a keen look at the question. The church has its beginning in Jesus, the Teacher, and his disciples; there is a pedagogical relationship here-the rabbi and the Twelve. Those Twelve constituted a small community. That first community will later be extended to Samaria; it will go to

Antioch where it will have its first Hellenistic experience. The Corinthian community will be made up of people who were nothing more than pagans.

Then comes the great story of the persecutions. Why did the Christians die? Why did Jesus die under Pontius Pilate? For the same reasons that Christians were persecuted under the Roman empire-Rome had divinized, made a god of, the emperor. Christians lived within the empire but among the poorest of the poor. They dwelt among the lower, but not necessarily the vulgar, classes. In their poverty, the Christians had no great estates, or the huge armies of the empire, or the proud fleets that sailed the Mediterranean. But in their poverty they proclaimed the eschatological kingdom and thus called into question the divinity of the emperor and the system of the empire. With their vision of, and hope for, the rebirth of humankind, they became the target for the lances of the emperor. They were dragged to the arena as atheists. The Christians, atheists in regard to the emperor, were a subversive threat to the reigning kingdom. In a sense the Christians-awaiting a future kingdom -were responsible for what was later to be the Holy Roman empire or the Byzantine empire. They did not fight for this later historic development but they certainly sowed the seeds for it. They were really battling for another, eschatological kingdom. At any rate they became the moving force of history, de totalizing the Roman empire and casting it in a whole new mold.

THE FIRST CULTURAL TOTALIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY

The Christians themselves became a new totality called Christendom-the Holy Roman empire or the Byzantine empire. Christendom got its start toward totalization from a twisted understanding of Augustine's concept of

the city of God. The city of God and the city of the Devil were precisely two cities, the former of otherness and the latter of totality. Augustine says that those who love themselves are the founders of the Devil's city, whereas those who love God, that is, the Other, constitute the kingdom of heaven. But medieval people juggled Augustine's concept around and said, "Roman or Byzantine Christendom is the kingdom of God and the Arabs are the infidels." They thereby made a culture out of the kingdom of God and totalized this culture. Totalization means the identification of the church with the temporal state or the culture. All totalization is sin. The church, upon becoming totalized, loses its critical exteriority and puts itself forward as an institution *in* which all are to be saved. Herein arises the theology of Christendom, a theology of the Eucharist, of baptism, of the church, of the whole.

Clearly, then, if everything is taken care of and we are already in the kingdom of heaven and the feudal lords along with the princes and kings are the depositories of the authority of God, we can baptize everybody practically at the moment of birth. The church as an institution is part of Christendom and in turn sees the order as sacred. Whoever rebels against the feudal lord rebels not only against the natural law but also against the divine law. There thus comes a point where exteriority is identified with totality because there is only the one order. This is why a theologian from Uruguay says that "in Christendom there is no mission because everybody is Christian." If there is no mission, there is no prophecy. And if there is no prophecy, all we have is an ecclesiastical institution identified with the culture. If this is so, we are then in a situation of sin because the church has become totalized.

And how are the non-Christians treated? They are

turned over to the secular arm and burned at the stake. The other is murdered: Stalin's Siberia and the jails of the Inquisition are methods for erasing the other. In both instances the same logic is at work. The other, instead of being loved and respected, is murdered and therefore the totality is totalized; it becomes impossible to break out of it and go beyond it. This theology of Christendom, this identification of the church with a given culture, is part of the crisis we are suffering from. The big problem lies in getting beyond the crisis.

FIRST THESIS: THE CHURCH "BEFORE" THE WORLD

In the first place, the church is always and primarily *before* the world. Thus, if there is totality in the pre-Christian world, if the world is already a given, already created, it will now be re-created, reborn through the function of the church. We begin with a world constituted as created. The church nevertheless comes from outside and as already preconstituted. The first position of the church is to invade the world from outside. It can also be said that this is its first function: The church is a "face-to-face" of itself with the world. This face-to-face, which every Christian lives out on an individual level and which is lived out also on the social and even historico-political level, signifies crisis-in the Greek sense, from the verb *krinein*, which means "to be critical," "to separate." To criticize means to stand at a distance in order to form a judgment. This criterion or judgment is, in a way, the 'Judgment of God.' It is revealed to us, or, better still, we discover what is the meaning of totality as totality. The multitude that dwelt in the Holy Roman empire, or in Hispanic Christendom, or wherever, accepted totality as divine, as totally obvious. They were completely naive in regard to totality as such. They exclaimed: "Our king-

dom is the only one blessed by God and apart from it there is nothing but barbarism. " If we lived in barbarism, we would see that it is not so barbarous and that it makes its own kind of sense .

Where there is no "separation," no standing at a distance, there is no crisis. The one who comes from outside criticizes totality as totality and finds it totalized. This is why the early Christians were able to see that the Roman empire was demoniacal. Were they exaggerating? By no means, because when the Romans proclaimed the empire and the emperor to be divine, they were totalizing the whole system. But the same thing happens in our "Western and Christian" civilization: If we totalize it uncritically we also end with a demoniacal totality.

In the first place, then, occurs the crisis, in such a way that the church, the Spirit, comes from out of exteriority . The Spirit is *in* the church and that Spirit invades the world as Word. But that Word is a prophetic word, critical of totalization. If the church does not issue a summons to the world, if it does not point out to the world that it has closed in upon itself, it has failed in its essential mission. Its first step should be to criticize. This is where the dialectic begins between the king and the prophet, between Moses and the pharaoh, between Jesus and the leaders of his people-not to mention present-day instances.

The great epochs of the church occurred when the church exercised its critico-prophetic function, not just in calling attention to the sinful totalization of a system but also at the same time in pointing the way to liberation, a way out of totalization. To be concrete, how was all this set forth in Latin America? First there was totality that was the Amerindian world. It was made up of Aztecs, Incas, Caribs, who heard the prophetic voice of very few missionaries. Bartolomé de las Casas, for example,

makes a clear distinction between conquest and evangelization. Conquest is the precise opposite of evangelization because conquerors do not respect the other who is merely a thing in their world, whereas the evangelist respects the world and the culture of the other and liberates the other from self. This is what Paulo Freire calls the pedagogy of the oppressed.

This first Amerindian totality becomes partly evangelized but very soon the Word is stifled by a world become totalized all over again. Indians were gathered into Hispanic Christendom only to find themselves in a new kind of totalization where they cannot be Christian and Indian but are Christian and exploited workers in the viceroyship of Peru. Indians are stripped of their human dignity and become aliens in a culture where the evangelizing Word often serves no other purpose but that of integrating them, after baptism, into a civilization that exploits them. We have the word of many missionaries for this. To what end did we evangelize the Indian man who sold fish in Asuncion for a living or the Indian woman who did domestic chores, sleeping with the master and fulfilling other functions even more degrading? Just how far did the Word penetrate this world after the sixteenth century ?

Jesus talks explicitly about this Word in the parable of the Sower. God, through the church, sows seed that falls in different kinds of soil. Hence let there be an analogous acceptance of it.

Our first thesis, then: The church prophesies from the outside.

SECOND THESIS: THE CHURCH "IN" THE WORLD

The church is not only "before" the world but also "in" it. You will remember the alternative of which Jesus spoke: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world

but that you preserve them from the Evil One." The church invades, enters *into* the world.

The church is not made up of only the oppressed even though Christ came among us and took the form of a servant. The church is also human and takes on not only the form of a slave but often the form of the oppressor . This becomes a very serious matter. Because the church is *in* the world, it assumes the errors of the world. There are Christians who are poor by choice or because of an accident of birth. On the other hand, there are Christian subjugators who collaborate with the sin of subjugation-the only sin. The Christians who identify with the powerful, the rich, the elite, the oppressors tend to divinize the reigning system. They are the ones who "consecrate" the historic states and defend the power of kings, emperors, lords, and presidents as a matter of divine delegation. In essence the system becomes divinized and prophecy is out of the question. Christians who identify with the poor, on the other hand, are free in the face of the system. Having nothing, they have nothing to lose and nothing to defend in the system. Poverty as an evangelical disposition is nothing more than an openness to the future, to the eschatological kingdom; it stands free before the temporal kingdom, the reigning totality. Only when the church identifies itself with the poor and the oppressed can it accomplish its prophetic function.

When Christians identified themselves with the powerful after having suffered persecution for their defense of the poor in the Roman empire, they adopted as their own the culture of the empire. It was thus that they adopted the pagan Latin language, which came to be considered sacred. What a chore it was to rid ourselves of Latin! A pagan tongue and we took it to be the most sacred of languages.

The process of incarnation, in-totalization is difficult

but, once it is accomplished, it is not easy to free the church from it. This enfleshment of the Word is a process of acculturation in which Christians absorb a culture. It is a happening that apologists have to contend with. They attempt to preach the gospel to the Romans, using Roman categories. In the *Letter to Diognetus* it says that in nothing do we Christians differ from the Romans; we dress the same, speak and write the same language, and do the same kind of work. There is only the difference that we Christians adore a God who is not a creature. How deeply the Christian became assimilated to the Roman empire! And this is what distinguished the Christians from the Jews. The Jews remained "separated" (*farisim*: Pharisees) because they had a vocation to prophecy, but they did not accept the Incarnation.

The Jews lack the Incarnation and this is where we Christians have differed from all Jews at all times. They have never had a sense of incarnation.

In Latin America (Amerindia) the evangelization entered into a culture and, at the same time, became a Christendom. This incarnation in the form of colonial Christendom supposes, nevertheless, the assumption of all the errors of totality. This totality, as we have said, has a center and a periphery. The peripheral world in turn has an elite and a people. And indeed the church is in the "center" (in France, the United States, and, in the case of the Byzantine church, in Russia); it is found in our oligarchies, naturally, in our upper classes, and also in the oppressed. We have here a strangely equivocal situation. Every sociological analysis of dependence or of social classes ought to be taken into account here and put to use. The church is *real* but it is also equivocal as far as its concrete manifestation is concerned.

There are subjugators and subjugated in the church and no ecclesiology can afford to overlook this fact. But

that brings up the question: How accommodating can the church be? Are the ones who collaborate with subjugation as "angels" of the "prince of this world" really a part of the church? If we say No, then we will have to let them know that they are not Christians. This is a serious matter .

The parable of the Wheat and the Chaff sheds light on this problem. It is not up to us to root out the non-Christian elements in the church, because we are not the "Judgment of God." But it is certainly not the same thing to be poor among the subjugated as it is to be influential among the subjugators, because the subjugators commit sin and cause scandal, whereas the poor do not commit the sin of subjugation but are, rather, the victims of it. The poor person is the just person. For this reason Jesus chose to be poor, a "man of the people." It does matter what side we are on. The church, living *in* the concrete reality, falls into the equivocity of the world. When this goes unnoticed, an aristocracy that calls itself Christian will want to manipulate the church. The most genuine thing about the church, that which is Christ in it, is the poor, not because they are poor but because, being dominated by the system, the poor are at the same time *exterior* to it. An example would be a poor man going by a rich man's house on a cold winter's day. Shivering with the cold, he sees the rich man through the window basking in the warmth of an open fire. There are two different worlds-and the poor man is outside the rich man's world.

The poor are always on the outside. They go to the bank to ask for a loan, but, because they have no assets, they come away empty-handed. The rich man, on the other hand, who already has millions, is given more millions. Or take the case of the poor woman going to the Post Office to buy stamps; she must wait at the end of the

line. But a lawyer coming in goes right to the head of the line and says, "I'm in a big hurry." The poor woman, saying nothing, waits patiently for her turn. All day, everywhere, the poor are made to feel outside. They are unable to cope with the intricacies of the system. All they know how to do is put up with abuse. This *experience* of exteriority is at the root of the gospel saying, "theirs [the poor] is the kingdom of heaven." They are already in the kingdom because in the exteriority of the present system lies the future, the eschatological kingdom. This is not a question of symbolism but of concrete reality: "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The Beatitudes were seen to be paradoxical (in Greek *paradoxon* is the opposite of a common opinion). Of course, the Beatitudes go against the opinion of the totality. But if we are able to perceive "the logic of exteriority," they become perfectly rational. The Beatitudes are to be taken in a very literal sense.

The church, then, is *in* the world-in its incarnation. But being enfleshed, it gets mixed up in the errors of history. Nevertheless it has criteria for discerning its function.

THIRD THESIS: THE CHURCH AS PROPHETIC INSTITUTION

We can now begin to describe the nature of the church. The church is a prophetic institution. It is an institution but at the same time it is prophecy. It can be said that it is a new paradox. It certainly seems unthinkable that an institution could also be prophetic.

Let us use as an example a priest who would be completely perverse, whose only ambition is to become rich by using church money to invest in property. We would say that he has become totalized. Nevertheless he remains an institution. And so it is that he reads the gospel

on a Sunday morning, which is heard by a young person who then feels called to prophecy. We have here a paradox, but the church is an institution that proclaims prophecy. If there were no institution, prophecy would be pure anarchy, a utopia without content.

If the institution had no prophecy, it would be annihilated, it would be totalized in sin. Latin Christendom, because it would not allow for exteriority, downgraded prophecy as a mission. It totalized the culture; the lord bishop had armies and was a temporal power. An example of this was the archbishop of Toledo before the reforms of Cisneros.

The church is a prophetic institution. When the institution closes in on itself, becomes totalized, as did Latin America's colonial Christendom, seeing Christ as "King" becomes most acceptable. To see him as "King" is appropriate for someone who is totalized. If, in my totalization, I do not look to the future, I begin to interpret the church from the point of view of the political state. I want Christendom with its princes and kings to be like the political state. Thus arises the figure of the king. "Christ the King" is a new name for Christ born of a certain totalization of the institution. What a far-fetched and ill-defined name for the Christ who historically did not want to be crowned king-although ironically they nailed to the cross the inscription JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS. Whenever totalization gets into trouble, people spring to its defense in the name of orthodoxy.

From 1930 on there had been growing among Latin Americans the ideal of a New Christendom. Catholic Action set out to reconvert Argentina and other nations of Latin America into Catholic nations. By "Catholic" was meant the Middle Ages and a great deal was said about that in the 1930s. Leon Bloy, Charles Péguy, and many

others glorified the Middle Ages. The church was again identified with a culture. Since there was a crisis, the question was how to reintroduce the medieval totality or at least defend it. There was much talk about defending the faith ("secretariats for the defense of the faith" were very much the order of the day). And instead of undertaking the mission of exteriority, this was seen to be the enemy, because we were totalized and we were defending ourselves against the other. People defend themselves against the other when they are not in a state of mission or prophecy; in a state of totalization, mission is impossible and even more so when people think they must defend the institution as an absolute.

The intraecclesial defense of the church is a sin on the part of the church. It brings to mind the parable of the Leaven and the Dough. If the leaven is removed from the dough and is constituted as totality, it rots. It works as leaven only when it is inside the dough. It is leaven and nothing else. This means that there is an institution, but it makes sense only by doing the job of fermenting the dough. Apart from the dough, it rots.

Thus it was that Christendom was losing out in the defense of the faith. Faith needs no defense. How will I defend the faith if I see the other as an enemy? In whom will I believe if I have no one in whom to believe? The only thing I would then be defending would be a doctrine. But faith can never be reduced to a mere doctrine because faith is to accept the word of the other, of the poor who today are the epiphany of God. If the other is for me the infidel, the barbarian, the enemy against whom I am on the defensive, faith becomes impossible. I am in a totalization, which bars me from mission; this is Sill.

The church, on the other hand, is essentially a missionary and prophetic institution and, as I will explain

later, a liberating institution. I cannot first define the institution and then the mission, as we were once taught—Organize the community first and then go forth to the apostolate; organize the community first and then figure in what way we are to be prophetic. No indeed! The community is to be organized *around* what we call apostolate, it is to be organized *in and for* prophecy, mission, and service to exteriority. If we start first with community only, the essential law of its constitution is already contradicted. At whatever point there is no exteriority for the church to fulfill its mission, it would die. And we shouldn't be at all surprised, when at the end of time the kingdom comes, that the church would disappear because it would no longer be necessary, because there would be no historic exteriority. The kingdom will have come.

We speak of the militant church and of the triumphant church. The triumphant church is not the militant church; it is the church that remains when the militant church disappears. What I mean is that when the church has no exteriority, it disappears. When it becomes totalized in the shape of Christendom and can no longer anticipate the kingdom of heaven, it passes itself off as the kingdom; and that puts us right at the portals of hell. To pretend that I rule heaven is to set myself up as a "prince of this world"; as an idol of a divinized system, I proclaim, "We are already in the kingdom of heaven."

It should be observed here just how intrinsic it is to the church to be defined in terms of exteriority and how its essence is at stake in this regard.

Let us use a concrete example. We still see among us the religiosity of the people. If we want to bring about an effective pastoral praxis among the people, we must first bring about reforms in the church. The clergy, for example, if they are trained apart from the day-to-day

living of the people cannot undertake a real pastoral praxis among the people. If we are to have such a praxis, clerical recruitment and formation must be reformed.

This does not mean, however, that the reformation should come first and later the apostolate, but that in the act of prophesying to the world, we will find that we will have to reform ourselves. This is the exact opposite of what we so frequently hear. Hans Kung, the great German theologian, as well as almost all European theologians, considers the church *in itself* (*ad intra*). It's what we call intraecclesial thinking. All they are doing is totalizing the church and never coming to the solution demanded, because to reform the church our thinking first has to revolve around the extraecclesial, whence the demands for internal reform will come.

Our theology has to be of the world, and from that world will come the demands of the poor for reform in the church, because the church is a *prophetic* institution. In the *institution* we find all that is historic, real, and concrete in the church. On the *prophetic* side we find all that is eschatological in it. We must not overlook either of the two dialectical extremes. Some are so concerned about the institution that they wish the prophets would clear out. The prophet is tempted at times into thinking, "Come what may, I shall fulfill *my* mission." But we should add that almost always they end up beating the air, in the sense that they get so involved in their own apostolate that they find themselves cut off from the institution, alone, in the camp of the enemy without a rear guard. In the end they fail to do what they set out to do and have to fight just to stay alive.

Of course there are others who say, "Look at those crazy guys beating the air! I'll stay with the institution even if it doesn't get reformed," and they do nothing. This is not the right attitude either. To accept the church

as it is to betray the church in its very essence. The hard task of the missionary, of the prophet, of the Christian is to be open to prophecy, maintaining a critical stance within the institution.

In Latin America, secularization-that is, the slow withdrawal of the world, because of its growing autonomy since the nineteenth century, from the church (in the sense that the world began taking land and money from the church and undermining its political and educational influence)-is liberating the church for its role of prophecy. Secularization is the "arm of the Gentiles" all over again, because the church had become identified with the colonial culture, with colonial Christendom.

As it becomes poor, the church is obliged to tilt toward exteriority; in doing so, it will pronounce the prophetic word. Poverty is the condition that makes prophecy possible. If I have property and money and they put pressure on me, saying, "You keep quiet or we will confiscate your property and everything you have in the bank," I will be tied hand and foot and will be incapable of the prophetic function. If, on the other hand, I have nothing in the bank, I cannot be the victim of extortion. Prophecy demands poverty. Poverty is not a virtue to be desired for itself, because in this case it would be meaningless. poverty is the giving of one's life in the fulfillment of the prophetic role. Those who are in no way compromised to totality because of poverty, can, from their exteriority, confront totality with its sin; they can criticize.

Thus secularization, this withdrawal of the world from the church, this preventing the church from exercising power, is the opening of the way to prophecy. It is the parable about the light not made to be hidden. Jesus says that when the light is hidden under the basket, we have to be able to take it out, to bring it to exteriority. Exteriority speaks to us of Christ (Messiah, prophet, anointed) and

no longer of the King. Christ the *King* is not the prophet of Galilee, the "suffering servant."

At the beginning of this chapter I put forth the article of the creed that reads, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church." Holy is *only* "the Other ." No one is ever holy, but only that which is to come. The Other is mystery, the one to be honored. Hence the church is holy when it preserves exteriority from every system, when it prophesies eschatologically against a totalized totality.

PROPHETICO-PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

I can now go back to the question I asked at the beginning of this chapter: What is the function of the church? Only now can I answer in the following way: Its function is a prophetic-pedagogical function of liberation. I am using the word "liberation" in its traditional sense to indicate at the same time "salvation" and "redemption." But I am also using the word in its economic and political sense, to indicate liberation from economic dependence, pedagogical dependence, erotic dependence, etc. The advantage of the word "liberation" is that, taking it in its biblical sense but also in its concrete and socio-political sense, it is charged with a strength that the word "salvation" no longer has. Salvation has an ethereal sense and has become almost meaningless. That is why I say that the church's function is a prophetic-pedagogical function of liberation.

Again, this means that history, in its economic, political, and pedagogical systems, in its family relationships, is constantly being totalized, and, in this totalization (through sin), people dominate other people. This, on the political level, is the oppressor state, the pedagogy of

subjugation, i.e., a socio-political version of *machismo*.

If totalization is not thrust toward the future, is not detotalized, it goes on forever. Look at how the Hindus have defended the five castes for centuries. The castes came about through successive conquests in the subcontinent and were later sacralized. The Brahmins are the first caste and are on top of the heap, then come the military princes, then the artisans, until we come to the farmers. The lowest caste is made up of the pariahs, who have no respect for the order. This kind of system could go on forever because, once the order is sacralized, anyone who rebels against it is severely punished. The system is so well entrenched that any change from within is impossible.

The Chinese also, with their emperor and mandarins, endured for centuries because there was no one to detotalize their system. These systems prevailed for so long in India and China because within these cultures there was no prophetic-pedagogical and liberating institution like the church. What a pity that when we Christians are asked what the church has done, we don't know how to answer. This ignorance amounts to stupidity. Not to see that the church has been the moving force of history in our culture for two millennia! What further proof do we need than the stagnancy of India and China (before the revolution, which came about through contact with Christianity)? What this means is that these two cultures did not have within them a dysfunctional, destructuring capacity that would have detotalized them, thrust them into the future instead of clinging to the ontologies of totality found in Confucius and the Rig Veda. What happened? Exactly what I am saying-no one identifying with the poor, the outcasts came along to found an institution with a capacity for exteriority, to proclaim that

their system was unjust and that a future, more just system is possible. (The only perfect system is beyond history.)

This is precisely what the Christians did in the Roman empire. Later they were able to do the same in the Holy Roman empire and in modern Europe. This dynamism was not due, as some seem to think, to access to the Mediterranean. In a sense, the Indian Ocean was better situated and China had a greater social cohesion. The Chinese were more culturally advanced than the Romans (witness their many inventions). Granted. But what happened? Simply that among the Romans there was a de-structuralizing element, as a principle, a category. The other was respected; whoever went beyond the system was held to be of greatest value. This was not the case in India or China.

If the highest value is found within the system, who can move it? But if the opposite is true, a system cannot long remain immobile. It should be clear, then, that the function of the Christian in the world is precisely to de-structuralize the totality totalized by sin. We can say that it is a rabble-rousing, subversive function, or whatever you want to call it. This is the subversive function of the church in world history and this is liberation. Go back and read the Scripture epigraph at the beginning of this book (Luke 23) and perhaps you will see what I am getting at.

But liberation from what exactly? From the prison of the system that is death. Jesus said, "Leave the dead to bury their dead" (Matt. 8:22). That is what sin is, the first kind of death. To die it is not necessary to be lowered into a tomb because the totalized system is already a tomb. And who will raise it up? The one who converts it and thrusts it toward the future.

This way of seeing things throws a whole new light on

them. There is a man who is of the flesh, says Paul, but there is a man who is according to the Spirit and who is reborn (I Cor. 15) .And Jesus says, "The wind [that is, the Spirit] blows wherever it pleases" (John 3:8), and he who receives it is reborn, raised up anew. We have to be born again! And this means precisely that we should get out from under totality, the system, sin, and walk in exteriority together with the poor. It would almost seem that we have been blind. It is the liberation of the oppressed from sin. Sin had totalized everything, "privatized" it. Sin had become minimized; a child steals a dollar from his mother to buy ice cream-that was sin. Going to bed with somebody you're not married to--that was sin. Everything was privatized, reduced in scale, minimized. We had taken away from sin its monstrous reality, its heartless subjugation. Sin is the whole political order as totalization, the whole ideological order as totalization, the whole ideological order that makes us believe that the culture of the system is the best, the culture that is touted on television and radio, in the schools at all levels, through books and every other way possible: That is sin. It is sin acceptable to all because all are guilty of it.

So, in saying "liberation of the oppressed from sin," I am saying what Jesus said when he quoted Isaiah, chapter 61: "The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favor [liberation], ..." that is, a year in which prisoners will come forth from their prisons.

Where the text says, "The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me," the meaning is that the Spirit enters in from exteriority. When the Spirit enters into the totality, the Incarnation is begun anew (it is the Spirit

who begets Jesus in the flesh of Mary), a time, a year of liberation, an exodus from oppression, from sin, death, injustice (see Rom. 8). Do we not have here a logic that functions as a fresh historical rationality?

There still remains, then, much that we must learn to think about, that we must discover in Christianity. We must not allow five centuries of ideology to keep essential "things" from us. We have not been fed a pack of lies. But Christianity, in the measure that it continues to grow in history, continues to discover new possibilities; and we are in a time of grace. There is a "homogenous evolution of dogma" (to quote Father Arinteros). We can say that there is growth, in the sense of a continuous explication of the implicit. Indeed, I believe that, in these fantastic times in which Latin Americans are living, we shall very quickly recover a universal and political sense of sin and, therefore, also a universal and political sense of redemption. The search has been grand. In order to continue, we must accept the turmoil that comes with it.

The redemption of the oppressed from sin is liberation. (Redemption means saving the other by taking that person's place as a hostage.) Concretely, it is the liberation of the woman dominated by *machismo*, of the child from a subjugating pedagogy. By child I also mean disciple, citizen, patriot. In the phrase "subjugating pedagogy" I include all institutions that gloss over reality in a way that makes the oppressed believe that by nature they are destined to be slaves and that anyone who does not rebel against the "order" is a model of sanctity. This is a pedagogy that we have been made to feel in our bones and none of us can declare ourselves innocent (naturally I include myself). We simply do not have a critical conscience sufficiently clear to determine to what point we have identified a subjugating pedagogy with the nature of things.

We are talking about liberation from political injustice, that of the dominating class over the dominated classes, that of the systems that subjugate people. This is sin. It should be clear that liberation, in the sense I am using the word, is quite traditional in the church, something we have always seen in the church. We agree with Gustavo Gutierrez that all that the theology of liberation has done is to make us rethink all of theology by putting it in motion. Theology in recent times has been within an order that was thought to be eternal. But that is not so because the eternal is always act, process; the process is passage and the passage is Pasch. The theology of liberation is a paschal theology in the sense of being liberating. We leave sin behind and head for the kingdom; accompanying us as a historic sign is a concrete, historical plan for liberation. I take my stand on this, on what is profoundly traditional, going back to what has always been. But I do not say what many keep saying is traditional – which is to hide tradition.

On the other hand, it can be said that those who confuse their own present order with every possible order are indeed in error; they are traditionalists. Since they are so sure of their truth, they are critical of those in the paschal process as if the latter were the ones in error. They behave exactly like the Sanhedrin when Jesus declared himself to be the Son of God, the Christ (Matt. 26: 63-64); they tore their vestments because they thought they *possessed* God. How could anyone be God without their knowing about it? They were self-divinized!

MYSTERY AS "BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS"

In the process of history the church fulfills the function of detotalization, which means "breaking down the barriers" (see Eph. 2). For Paul the mystery of Christ

consists in breaking down the barriers so that there will be neither Gentile nor Jew but all will be "one." That "one" is eschatological. But breaking down barriers is historical. Indeed, breaking down barriers is precisely the passage; it is to grace someone, to set someone free, to set at liberty someone who is a prisoner. Hence the origin of the word "grace." Grace is like a free-conduct pass to someone in jail; it is the liberation of prisoners, or, as the army would say, a discharge. Grace, then, is the act itself in which prisoners are set free. They are told, "You who were slaves are now free." Now they have changed their ontological status. To set them free is to open the gates of the prison, of totalization, of sin, of death. Therefore to liberate is to rise anew, it is new life, new history, new person. All is new.

The Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev says that the Greeks were unable to conceive the question of newness. They affirmed that things move, that Is, It Is permissible to have change *within* the system, but a *new* system, never! That would be absurd. How can there be any kind of newness in pantheism, for which everything already is., Newness in history is precisely the sign that God is the Creator and that there is a God who is exteriority. Because God is the Other, it is possible that there would still be something new-not everything is a "repeat of the same." If everything were a repeat of the same, this would mean that same is all there is. If this were so, it would mean that God is now the system and that is pantheism. It is idolatry and the bedrock of sin. The same is not all there is. The new is better than the same and it is future. Therefore Christians hurl themselves forward to what is to come (*adventus*); Christians never say, " All that is past was better ." Rather, they say, in hope and faith, "Everything in the future will be better ." The

future of history is always new. The totalized world, then, the *flesh* of sin, is conquered by the ecclesial act of "service."

Liberation is the same as service in the original Judeo-Christian sense. Service is an act that goes beyond the system; it is gratuitous because it is done for the Other as other; it is the praxis of the servant of Yahweh. God anoints his servant with the Spirit and consecrates him prophet. The prophet commits himself in the process of liberation. In that process he must be determined to go all the way to death.

Jesus said that only those who lay down their lives for their friends truly love him. The prophets know that they will have to bear a heavy cross because to "break down barriers" of sin, of the system, is not at all easy. Many prophets, like Jesus, will die "outside the walls."

Jesus conquered death and sin. When he breached the wall of totality, the flesh, the system simply had to kill him. His death was the eschatological and salvific fact of history. There is a dialectic between sin as death and the death of the just as resurrection. In the same way there is an ecclesial act of service, of historic work, like that of the servant of Yahweh.

The church, in the first place and in essence, identifies with, and commits itself to, the poor. But if it is also committed to the subjugators, it becomes equivocal. If the subjugators take charge of the church and thereby displace the poor, the church becomes sterile. It is a sad day in church history when the sin of its members manages to stifle prophecy. Today we are living through a joyful time in Latin America because at this point in our history there are martyrs, the tortured, and the blood of the persecuted is being spilled by tyrannical governments. And for this reason the church among the poor,

even though it be small, is sending forth its sign. Maybe very few do this. Nevertheless they are doing it, a weak flickering light but light nevertheless.

Again, the church will have to be with the poor and perform for them the "work of liberation." In fact, it has done this all through its history. In the Roman empire it put itself on the side of the poor and cast the process of history toward the future. Europe was born thanks to the liberating thrust in the church of the monks and farmers. At the time of the Renaissance, Europe, occupying the center of the world, proves through the conquest of the whole world that it is more *real* (fantastic but true) than any other culture. When Pizarro confronts Atahualpa, he is a much freer and more adult man than the Incan. He understands freedom whereas Atahualpa is still in the tragic world of the eternal return and therefore he is conquered. The Europeans are at the stage of nascent modernity, since they are no longer in the Roman empire but in the age of Latin Christendom, and therefore they are more real than Incan or Aztec-and, I would add, more real than the Chinese or Hindus. They are more real because they are more critical, more liberated. But instead of *servicing* the Incans and the others as they should have, the Europeans used their strength to dominate them. There is sin; what God had given to the Europeans as a gift they used for themselves to subjugate the very weak. Instead of ministering to them as good Samaritans, the Europeans subjugate them. At any rate, Europe was in fact more critical and more real because, thanks to the church, it had gone through many revolutions. The same thing is also happening today. Today again the church is thrusting humankind toward the future. And if Latin America is liberated, if the church in Latin America fulfills its mission at this time, it will go on sending forth its signs. If not, how great

will be the scandal to the world! What a scandal for all the underdeveloped countries of the world! What a scandal if the Latin American church continues in solidarity with the present imperial totality, which is the center dominating the periphery! Hence it is clear that the Latin American church must give witness before the whole world, before China, India, southeast Asia, the Arab world. Its witness, its sign is: commitment to the liberation of Latin America and against the domination exercised by the imperialist countries. If the church does not commit itself to liberation, it will deny that Christ is truly present in that "passage," the "pasch of resurrection," in which the very essence of the church is at stake.

THE CHURCH, LIBERATING FORCE OF HISTORY

Liberation is a historic passage and at the same time an eschatological sign. The church in history, again, is not a state. States are the cocoons of history, building and destroying for a while but being shed later along the way. Nor is the church the eschatological kingdom, which finds its fulfillment in ultimate totality. Rather, it is the liberating force of history, a force that will be spent when Christ comes again; his coming (the Parousia) is his only task. The church struggles so that people will mature and be able to shed the cocoons, the historic systems, and move on to more just systems until the kingdom, that is, Christ as Parousia, comes.

The liberation or salvation of history is the function of the church. This function is the detotalization of all finite systems that come along. These finite systems are never good in themselves but good only in reference to the future. The very moment a system sees itself as permanent, therein lies the sin of subjugation. A good system will look to the historic future. But a system is guilty of sin

when it sees itself as the sole and irreplaceable system and therefore represses liberation. And it is here that the church must step in and "break down the barriers" and thrust everything toward the future.

In human history, in the Roman and Byzantine empires or in the Holy Roman empire, until we come to the "center" of our day (Russia, the United States, Europe), we see the church fulfilling its prophetic-historico-eschatological mission. More in one epoch, less in another. Today in Latin America it has returned to its ancient vocation in small groups committed to the poor but staying within the institution.¹ To discover those signs is to know in the light of faith the meaning of what is happening; it is to know where the eschatological remnant is. These are precisely the ones who place themselves at the critical level of history, who see a newness surfacing among the poor and the oppressed—the victims and not the perpetrators of sin. Those who place themselves among the poor are faithful to history and *make* history by liberating the people. Those who place themselves among the subjugators place themselves in what is dead, in sin, and they slow down, they retard history, kill the liberators, fulfill exactly the function of Jerusalem. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets!" (Matt. 23:37). Read all that Jesus says about these things in the Gospel. It becomes quite obvious that he is inevitably destined to die.

* An eminent prelate of the church told me that the account of more recent events (1962-1973) in my *Historia de la Iglesia en America Latina* was a sort of caricature. I accept the judgment: caricature for a pagan history, because what is being sought are prophetic signs and not the mere recounting of events. It is "insane" history as far as professional historians are concerned (see I Cor. 1:17-2:5).

Being a member of the church, then, does not essentially mean that you have already entered into the kingdom of heaven, there to enjoy peace at last. To be a member of the church, which has a critico-liberating function, is to take on a responsibility, a commitment to the work of liberation. And right here we run into the most serious kind of confusion: To identify the church with the kingdom of heaven is to define it in terms of a ruling world order, for example, Christendom. In that case the church would be on the side of subjugation; it would become immobilized, silenced; it would retard history, kill it. Only when we realize that the kingdom is in the future and that to be a member of the church is not a signal honor but a responsibility will we see the church in a whole new light.

THE SACRAMENTS (AS CONSECRATION AND CELEBRATION) AND MINISTRIES (AS A FUNCTION) OF LIBERATION

Only now can we bring up the question of ministries and functions of the church. The church, as a prophetic institution, has distinct functional parts. But these "parts" in turn play a role of exteriority in regard to the very body of the church.

The modern experience of the church, European and even Latin American, has "privatized" the Christian person: To be a Christian is a matter for the individual. I made *my* examination of conscience; I had an individual or privatized conscience to examine. Furthermore, Christendom was identified with the church and, as I said, the reform of the church is at heart an intraecclesial and, at times, a political affair. Witness the "reform of Cisneros" in Spain under the Catholic kings. These two situations should be criticized: the privatization (life

should be *communion*) and a Christendom that defines itself intraecclesially (we will find the solution in an understanding of the church from *outside* the church).

This can be presented on at least two levels: first, on the level of the Christian as one of the people—the *laos*, from which comes the word "laity"; second, on the level of the Christian as pastor or priest of the people. These two aspects go hand in hand.

The first of these is the ministry or function of being members of the church. We may ask: What is a Christian person, taken in the sense that the Christian is the anointed, the messiah? What does it mean to be messianic in our time? It means to be an alive member of the church in the function we have indicated. It is first of all to be before the world in a prophetic way; second, it is to be incarnated in that world; and, last, it is to detotalize the system, pointing the way to liberation as a sign of the eschatological.

What does it mean to be Christian? Indeed, in reality, one does not *be* a Christian but is always in the process of *becoming* a Christian. Those who are becoming Christians, as Kierkegaard would say, are not ones from the beginning. This "becoming Christian" is a movement of liberation in exactly the same way that we have been explaining all along. What I am getting to is a pedagogical introduction to the "use" of certain guidelines or fundamental categories of Christian thought.

Non-Christians live in a pre-Christian, pagan world. One day, the Word comes to them, borne by the church. That is why one person cannot carry the Word, because it will die with that person. It must be borne in history by a historic institution. Let us go back to the beginning of the description. One day the Word, prophetic and critical, invades the world and it points out to me the road of liberation from the prison of the world that has entrapped me. That Word is a call; it is a vocation that

invades the flesh, the system, the totality. In a way I was dead because I was repeating the "same." Newness was passing me by.

When am I called? Whenever I listen to the other, to the poor. It is really more than a call, it is a shout, a loud clamoring; the truly Christian call to be part of the church is addressed to me by the poor but by means of the Word in prophetic function. It is the call of a poor person who loudly demands liberation. Again I say that the poor are the epiphany of the Word of God.

If we are not "convoked" in this way, our call can be a temptation and not a genuine call. Only the poor are the epiphany of God and whoever thinks to hear the word of God directly and not through the poor begins to interpret it badly. Hence there are many Christians who paradoxically lived a Christianity of Christendom where they made a "god" of the system that told them if they went to Mass they would get to heaven. That "god" was not the God of Christianity, because they had totalized "god" within their system; they could exploit people and still go to heaven. This is a contradiction, because to exploit others and still enter into the eschatological kingdom is impossible. If I exploit a person, I am divinizing my system and I cannot be in any other system than the one I live in. This is hell and that "god" is an idol. Let us never forget that hell has already begun for all those who are "following the way of this world, obeying the ruler who governs the spirit who is at work in those who resist the faith" (Eph. 2:2)-faith in the poor as the epiphany of God and his Christ.

Really to hear God is to hear him through someone who, from *outside* the system, tells me that the system is not the only possible one, that there can be another. Only when I become aware that the system is not divine can I hear divinity as exteriority. Only when I am able to comprehend the finiteness, the historicity, the inevitable

coming to an end at any moment of the system in which I find myself-my home, my factory, my class, my club or whatever -can I hear the Word of God that calls me from the future. This Word is not abstract but is a summons to me on the part of the poor who cry out to me, in effect: "Do justice! because we have rights that are not yours. We have rights that arise in us and not in you. We do not ask that you give us what is yours but that you give us what is ours, starting with our worth as persons." If I recognize that word, I will be recognizing the Word of God.

But look how paradoxical this all becomes! Consider the case of the Christians who adored a "god" of their own making and who now suddenly discover the poor and want to work for their liberation. Now they say, "I no longer believe in God" and that they are having a crisis of faith. It is only the beginning of what I would call the political dark night of the soul, which St. John of the Cross never got around to describing. The trouble is that we don't know how to tell them quickly that they are in the preliminary stages of the encounter with the God of Israel, because the one they held to be "god" was no more than a fetish. That "god" went up in smoke, the same god they had preached to them in Catholic Action or they learned about in a twisted way from their catechism; but the one they were encountering in the history of the poor is the God of Israel. We must tell them that they are living through the political night of faith, not the kind of dark night in John of the Cross:

On a dark night
burning with anxious love,
Oh, great good fortune!
I left the quiet of my house
without being noticed.

The house of the system was quiet and I, escaping through the door of liberation, might one day come to God. But to come to that God, I must pass through the night. And we say, "That man has lost the faith, poor fellow. He has become an atheist." But we do not understand that he had become an atheist in regard to the idol. It was precisely the preliminary stage needed to believe in the Christian God. It should be clear now how possible it is to see things in a different light.

When we discover and become aware that, in casting our lot with the poor, the oppressed, our commitment can lead to death, then we are on the road to Jerusalem, we are saints. And in order to be completely so, we must be confirmed in our option by ecclesial consecration. We are like the confused man Philip met on the road; after having explained the gospel to him for a few minutes, Philip baptized him. The man was already on the way; it only remained to point it out to him. The church frequently says that the politically committed person is running away from God. The Christian vocation, on the other hand, is always a vocation to the liberation of a people.

To become a Christian is to get to the point where we can hear the voice of God, but the historic voice. One becomes a Christian through a catechumenal process. The catechumenate is a commitment to an ecclesial community and a discovering day by day the *new* "meaning" of things; it is to know how to interpret the voice of the poor historically and concretely. It is not just a lot of theories we were once taught but, rather, a knowing how to hear the poor who summon us day by day. Thus it is that, little by little, in the Christian community, among the "people of God," through an existential practice and not through a theory, one learns the meaning of things. This new meaning does not become clear to me,

for instance, because someone explains something theoretical and I repeat it back from memory (to repeat from memory is to repeat "the same"). This is the way we studied the catechism. To repeat "the same" is to repeat what is dead. The *new* cannot be repeated—we have to discover it; the new is the here and now, the how of responding to God. Learning by memory is a form of pedagogical domination. We cannot memorize heaven because it is in the future; we must be open and have faith and hope.

What this means, then, is that, in my day-to-day expectation of the kingdom and starting with the praxis of a community that teaches me its faith through its commitment, I learn the gospel. And when I have at last put myself on the road to liberation and am sufficiently mature for the process, then comes the supreme moment of my calling: "Are you ready to risk all for the liberation of the poor? Then you may approach, put on the white vestment, and be baptized. Baptism is a responsibility and not a prize." I am talking about the kind of prize a winning athlete receives after a race and, because of it, feels entitled to rest. It is not such a prize, and we should consider the disturbing parable of the Talents: because one man buried his talents, this was held against him. He would have been better off if he had received none.

Actually I do not receive baptism; rather, I am received into a prophetic body by baptismal consecration. We used to think that the individual being baptized was the substance and that baptism was an entitative accident. The grace of baptism was a received "quality." But it's just the opposite. Through baptism I am received "into" the church. I do not receive, I am received. Through baptism I am incorporated into the "prophetic body" of those who are determined to risk all in the church's liberating function in history. If I am not ready for this, it

would be better if I, like the young St. Augustine, were to say, "I'll not be baptized yet." There is danger of sin here, because baptism is a responsibility, a consecration as a prophet of history. We used to think that if you did not receive baptism, you would not be saved. But there is a dogma of faith that says: "No one will" fail to receive sufficient grace to be saved."

We have a contradiction here. Because of this, we have come up with concepts like "baptism of blood" and "baptism of desire." But because some neither shed their blood nor had any wish to become Christians, we had to fall back on something called the baptism of persons of good will. Nevertheless, I think we ought to look for a solution in another direction. The "Christic grace" comes to every person of good will and therefore each is saved as an individual. So, what is the church for? Precisely for what I have been explaining—to detotalize the historic systems and thrust them toward the Parousia. Were it not for the church, history would be irreversibly totalized and there would be no one to de totalize it, although persons of good will would go on being saved individually. The problem is not essentially a question of whether baptism saves individually. We can state this another way: Every person of good will arrives at the kingdom, and gets there through the mystical mediation of the ecclesial body, the church.

But, on the other hand, the church is an institution, as we have said, and in saying this, we are following the full Catholic tradition. Baptism is the consecration through which one enters the institution. One enters body and soul, with self-awareness and a sense of responsibility. Thus the *full* baptism we are talking about is a consecration that demands that I now, within my limitations, accept the responsibility of committing myself to the prophetic function in the world. I become "part" of the

church. We accept the fact that there can be other kinds of baptism, but they must all bear a relationship to the baptism we are talking about. This baptism allows us to participate in the mission of the church. We are consecrated in order to fulfill a prophetic-salvific function to all humanity. Hence the pre-Christian, who was *before* or *alongside* the church, through baptism becomes a Christian by being now *in* the church. Baptism consecrates one; it makes one a participant in a body that is a prophetic institution. We will have to take another look at baptismal consecration on all levels--erotic, pedagogic, political.

Immediately there arises another question: What about the ordinary people? The people who were a part of Christendom, the people who celebrate a kind of folk Christianity. What happened to them? If we reject the faith of the people, we would be guilty of a "*conciencialismo*" (which says that only the self-aware are capable of entering the church). Where does that leave the people? We have something of a contradiction here. A "self-aware" faith would lead to an elitist Christianity. This is close to the position of those who hold that the Christian faith is always a "minority." But there are firm reasons for seeing the people as an oppressed people; their historic catechumenate has been a matter of centuries of suffering. This people was evangelized by Latin and colonial Christendom and therefore has faith. Theirs is not what we would call a well-informed faith but, rather, a historic faith. They believe in the poor because of their poverty. This is why they are open to the Word of God. They have faith but not all that explicitly. I would go further--they are on the way, they are in the catechumenate, they are in process. They are often closer to the Lord than those in the church who subjugate them. The latter have made an idol of the system, whereas those

who do not believe in the system believe in the poor and are thus on the right road to God. The people's brand of faith is *catechumenal* and therefore rudimentarily Christian, indeed, at times explicitly Christian. They are frequently closer to the gospel than those who know theoretical theology but who, because they are the subjugators, have managed to make their theology serve the dominating system. Thus they deny the poor and also God; they raise an altar to the idol and formulate an ideology to which they give the name "theology." Often the Christian people, poor and of the masses, have criteria that are much more profound than those of a well-informed but misdirected elite.

Between them and the *explicit* prophet, who is a part of the institutional church with complete responsibility and awareness, there is an analogy. The seed here falls on still better ground; it falls on the good ground in the consciousness of the baptized individual prophetically committed to the liberation of the poor. The seed will grow with difficulty in the consciousness of the subjugator; but even though it falls by the wayside, it could still grow between two rocks. There is still the possibility of salvation.

Harvey Cox in his book *Feast of Fools* reminds us of something that is deeply meaningful. Our opulent, pragmatic, consumer society has lost a feeling for fiesta, joy, play. In the Middle Ages there were certain days, like Mardi Gras carnivals in Brazil and elsewhere, on which all rules were set aside, and sarcasm and scoffing at everything were the order of the day. It was a discharge of pent-up aggressiveness, a time for breaking out, for pure play. Play as a thing apart from the practical, pragmatic, utilitarian order of the day (alienated work to make something to sell) is like a present, a gift, like an anticipation of the kingdom. From this has come a whole

theology of play, a theme suggested by Nietzsche in the last century (and related with the Roman *otium*, the Greek *skhole*, and the Hindu nirvana). Certainly the feast of liberation has nothing to do with cold revolutionaries devoid of a sense of humor (who take life so seriously that they end up in embittered resentment), nor with the fun and games of the rich, nor even with the charming "feast of fools" of medieval Christendom. The feast of liberation is an explosive rejoicing, the contagious and enthusiastic happiness of a people being let out of prison. It's like a man getting out of jail and having a party among his loved ones to celebrate his freedom or like a soldier getting out of the army after a war and having a drink with friends to celebrate his return to civilian life. Or like in my country, Argentina, on May 25, 1973, when the people piled into the streets and shouted with joy because the oppressors were overthrown. The feast of liberation is the joy of an oppressed people and of those committed to their liberation. The sad people on that 25th of May were the oppressors.

The feast of liberation is not just a getting away from the routine of the daily grind but the end of the oppressive process and the beginning of a new world. It is not separate from day-to-day living, or parallel. It is a very real moment of day-to-day living. Rather than separate-ness it is a deepening of that day-to-day living. Of course we are not talking about the pragmatic kind of living the rich enjoy. On the contrary, we are talking of the burdensome living of the oppressed, which cannot be pragmatic because their *pragma* (their thing) has been ripped away from them. The feast of a people being liberated in a vibrant moment of their actual existence is something that can be reached out to and touched, not something abstract, put between parentheses, *otium*.

In the same way the festive celebration of the eucharis-

tic liturgy should not be looked upon as play (the rich seem to do this), nor as a feast of fools (a surface phenomenon of a totalized society that wants to forget its sins, that is, its state of oppression, and that is why the people at this time can even poke fun at the bishops). Rather it should be looked upon from the standpoint of the liberated person at the very moment of being set free. It should be a true feast, having continuity with day-to-day suffering—the feast of job, that of Jesus on the way to the cross, that of the Israelites in the hot, dry desert; a feast that is inscribed in the experience of the reality of a concrete, historical path. It is not a feast to help us forget about the oppressions of a system. It is a feast *in* the system but *of* the oppressed where there is rejoicing over past liberations as a promise of liberations to come and of the eschatological liberation. The eucharistic feast, visible presence of the risen Christ who reveals himself as eschatological, is the sacrament of anticipation of the kingdom to come, but kingdom understood as the end to all oppression and, therefore, sin. This is not the kind of feast where we get high on narcotics, drifting off into a nonexistent fantasy world. In this case the Mass would be no more than the opiate of the people. On the contrary, the contradictions and sufferings of living are realistically accepted by the sojourners in the desert in the festive spirit of a people celebrating its liberations.

On the 25th of May, when I saw vast numbers of people out in the street singing and shouting and waving flags (in an unaggressive way because nobody was threatening them, since their enemies were locked in the past) I couldn't help but say, This is what the parousia is going to be like. At the same moment, I understood that the Eucharist is the "feast of liberation" of an oppressed people being liberated in the infinite joy of him who gave himself to us as a Gift.